



Berrien County Trial Court

*Courthouse - 811 Port Street, St. Joseph, MI 49085
(616) 983-7111, Ext. 8386, FAX (616) 982-8634*

*Lynda A. Tolen
Trial Judge*

*Vivian Burton
Executive Secretary*

June 7, 2006

Member of the Michigan
House of Representatives
State Capitol Building
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Re: H.B. 6050

Dear House Members:

As a District Judge for nearly 20 years, I am happy to write this letter in support of H.B. 6050, recently introduced by Rep. John Proos and others.

A few months ago I contacted Rep. Proos regarding my concern over the gross inadequacy of the \$10 marriage ceremony fee which the probate and district courts may charge, given the Court time necessitated in preparing for, presiding over, and filing the license with the County Clerk following the ceremony. I knew the fee had not been raised since I became a District Judge in early 1987. As it turns out, this fee has remained at \$10 since it was established in the Revised Judicature Act of 1961.

Those of your Members who are old enough to have been around in 1971 may remember that as being the first year of President Kennedy's administration. At that time a bottle of soda pop or ice cream cone cost 10 cents; gas was \$.29/gallon and a loaf of bread was priced at about 20 cents. Wouldn't we all enjoy a return to those days - or at least to that cost of living! Unfortunately, though, those days are long gone and today's prices and costs reflect that.

Here in little Berrien County we perform roughly 300 marriage ceremonies a year. Many of these ceremonies are performed off-premises, often at halls, resorts, parks and beaches, private homes and restaurants. Many judges and magistrates, myself included, like to meet with the couple a couple of weeks before the wedding to get acquainted with them and to review ceremony plans and vows. We often attend a rehearsal off-premises the day before the wedding. By statute, we are prohibited from accepting any compensation or gratuity for performing this service. While we are happy to perform this important service to the community, many probate and district judges feel, as I do, that County Boards should be permitted to increase the fee for this service to more closely reflect the time involved and the value of the service to the public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lynda A. Tolen".

Lynda A. Tolen
5th District Judge